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# American Geographical Nomenclature.

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ADDRESS

—OF—

HON. W. G. McADOO,

—TO THE—

ASSOCIATED ALUMNI

—OF—

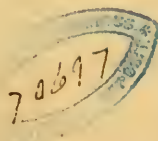
East-Tennessee Unibersity,

—AT—

Knoxville, Tennessee, June 20th, 1871.

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MILLEDGEVILLE, GA:  
FEDERAL UNION BOOK AND JOB OFFICE.  
1871.



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KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE, June 20th, 1871.

HON. WM. G. McADOO:

*Dear Sir:*—At a meeting this day of the associated Alumni of East Tennessee University, a vote of thanks was unanimously passed for your able, original, and instructive Address, this day delivered before them; and by their order I am instructed to request a copy of the same for publication.

With the hope that you may return a favorable reply to the request, and with sentiments of the highest personal esteem,

I am, sir, &c.,

W. A. HENDERSON,  
Secretary, &c.

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KNOXVILLE, TENN., June 21, 1871.

W. A. HENDERSON, Esq.,

*Secretary Associated Alumni E. T. University,*

DEAR SIR:—Your polite and complimentary note requesting a copy of my Address of yesterday, is before me. I comply with unaffected pleasure, and transmit herewith the MS. Its crudities and prolixities of composition I regret, but cannot amend for the want now of the element whose need in the hour of composition occasioned them—*time*. When Sir Walter Scott was asked why he had not written his life of Napoleon in two volumes instead of three, he replied “Because I had not time.”

I am, with great respect, yours, &c.,

W. G. McADOO.



# GEOGRAPHICAL NOMENCLATURE

OF THE

## UNITED STATES.

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*Brethren of the Associated Alumni of East-Tennessee University :*

Almost under the Equator in South America stands the snow-capped peak, long supposed, but mistakenly, to be the highest pinnacle of land on our globe. It bears the well known name of CHIMBORAZO—familiar to the ears of even school children. The name in one of our standard works is pronounced to be Spanish. That is an error. Baron Von Humboldt, in his “Views of Nature,” devotes some space to its derivation, ending by the closely reasoned conjecture that the name is a relic of lost people and a perished language. What a superb monument—a grand granite shaft 21,424 feet in height—its summit glittering with perpetual snow beneath the splendors of a tropical sun,—as the memorial of a lost race whose very name has passed away, whose language has vanished save the one word *Chimborazo*!

The name had descended, perhaps through several successive nationalities in occupancy of that sublime Andean region, to the proud race of the Incas. At time of the Spanish Conquest, it passed unmutilated to the followers of Pizarro, and thus is introduced to a permanent place in the written languages of the world of modern civilization.

In contrast to this notable example, the Geographical Nomenclature of the United States presents in our day some peculiar and perplexing evils. A brief consideration of these will constitute the main subject of the discourse this evening.

Our peculiarities of origin and history, and some of the leading features of our governmental organization, very naturally led to these evils. Blessings greater than the evils came from these circumstances. Imperfections form

a composite feature of every human institution—I may add of every earthly organization. The true philosophical economy is to eliminate the faults, and develop and increase the good elements, wherever possible, in all the wide range of practicalities pertaining to human existence. Perfection, though never attained, must be constantly sought if we would attain eminence. Michael Angelo remarked to a friend who wondered at the great artist's excessive labor to remedy slight defects, "Recollect that trifles make perfection, and that perfection is no trifle."

We have a vast Republic, destined doubtless to become yet vaster; a conglomerate mass of minor republics held together in one nationality by a system peculiarly our own. The Fathers nicely adjusted its checks and balances; and from their giant hands the orb of our Republic swung out in space and revolved among the Nations. So nicely was the adjustment of the centrifugal and centripetal forces perfected, that though convulsions of all sorts from the pettiest to the mightiest, have tested our orbital powers, we still revolve in the pathway of Republican Institutions, escaping alike the centrifugal forces of anarchy on the one hand, and the centripetal Sun of Despotism on the other. May our terrestrial astronomy—if such a term be admissible—continue the same forever!

The very natural and deserved love of our people for these fathers, and for the Revolutionary and subsequent heroes who shaped our greatness, commend themselves to our admiration. Gratitude for past favors has been said to have been forgotten occasionally among the sons of men.

But this gratitude has assumed one shape against which I beg this day to protest. I file my demurrer against excessive *geographical gratitude*. I will illustrate.

We have in the United States—or I should say *had* in 1864, the date of the latest authority on the subject within my reach—254 places named Washington—243 named Jackson—171 named Jefferson—with multitudinous Monroes and Madisons and Marions—Putnams, Clintons, Knoxes and Hamiltons. Ten of these leading names are applied to 1367 places—an average of nearly 137 places to each name. There is not a State or Territory in the Union where these favorite names have not been planted in the first footsteps of the American pioneer, during the ninety years of our post Revolutionary history. They spring up as spontaneously in the pioneer's footsteps as the present poet laureate of Great Britain makes the violets evolve from the footprints of his hero's mistress in one of his finest productions, "Maud."



We say nothing of names of *streets* in all of our American villages, towns and cities. There is not one in all the land which has not one named "in honor" of some of these great historical—and I may add *geographical*—heroes. The authors of American Geographical Nomenclature are evidently of the opinion of the noted "Captaine John Smith" of Powhatan and Pocahontas memory, who writes in his charming history of the Bermudas, "As Geography without History seemeth a carcasse without motion, so History without Geography wandereth as a Vagrant without a certaine habitation." Geography has certainly conspired with history in perpetuating these favorite names. They are not left to the *vagrancy* of history: but we may almost accuse them of a species of *Geographical* "vagrancy," since they have wandered into so many places; and I *could* add, I fear, *idly* wandered: a vagrancy unknown to the right valiant "Captaine John Smith," since we find on his map of Virginia not a single Smithton, or Smithville; and our investigations lead to the conclusion that not one of the 84 places in the United States named *Smith* (with or without "variations") has been named in honor of the knightly pioneer of that name in the New World. Alas! he did not live long enough to be a member of a State Legislature—or a leading constituent of any member! In short, "Captaine John Smith" lived too soon in the world's history, or died before his time! So that whatever he may be *historically*, *geographically* he is a *nobody*!

If these canonized geographical names in our Republic were restricted to *one* in each State, that might be endured. There are now but 37 States in the Federal Union. There are 10 Territories, also; and if the ten favorite Geographical names of Americans were similarly allotted to them, the total would be 47. Or if that should be deemed insufficient to attest our own quasi-apotheosis of our favorite heroes, we might double the number by assigning to each not only a town or city, but a *county* also, making a total of about 74. And this brings us to mention another geographical monstrosity against which we peculiarly protest.

It is not enough that each State and Territory should be running over with Washingtons, Jeffersons and the like; but their distribution on our great map has been effected in as disorderly a manner as possible.

In this, my native State, we have a Washington *county* to the East of us with *Jonesborough* as the seat of justice; and the *town* of Washington lies to the West of us and is the seat of Justice in *Rhea* county, whilst Rhea-town is in *Greene* county. In my adopted State (Georgia) Washing-

ton county has for its seat of justice *Sandersville*; and the town of Washington is in Wilkes county. In our neighbor Kentucky the *county* of Washington is in one part of the State, the *town* of Washington in another. In this noble State, *Jackson* is in *Madison* county; while Jackson county has Gainesville for its county town; *Madisonville* is in *Monroe* county, and the *town* of Monroe in Overton county. Occasionally, and quite exceptionally, we find the name of the county and its seat of justice in accidental coincidence—as this beautiful and flourishing city of Knoxville in Knox county; our Tennessee *Greenville* in *Greene* county; the town of Washington in Texas in the county of that name; and a few others equally fortunate in what may be termed their *geographical conjunctivities*; but usually all the resources of mathematical permutation have been exhausted to scatter a few dozens of favorite names over our grand national map of the United States to as many points as possible. It would seem that these cunning architects of our geographical system had used these patriotic names with nice and distributive calculation—as the civil engineer does his fastenings and his bolts when spanning an abyss with a bridge. Happy are we to-day to be standing on a portion of the structure braced by two good honored bolts conjunctively commemorative of the patriotic Henry Knox, the gallant Revolutionary hero, and the first American “Secretary of War,” under the present Constitution of the United States; and a name, too, not worn to a too degrading commonness by universality of National use—*Knoxville*, in *Knox county*—perhaps a little overdone in usage geographical; but not subjected to the “wasteful and ridiculous excess” of other great names.

If we withdraw our map-gazing eyes from these nomenclatural stars of the first magnitude, what a wilderness of lesser luminaries arrest the vision! And as we pass from one State-map to another, what a sameness of names! Verily inventiveness seems to have been wholly wanting in the improvisation of names, among the brave old pioneers who doubtless found the study of the arts of tomahawking and scalping of far more practical value than geographical nomenclature. Their immediate successors were too intensely occupied with daily practicalities of life to bestow names on localities with an enlarged consideration which embraced our whole country.

Passing therefore from the great Revolutionary and other historical names, we reach a still more numerous array—“the rank and file” of the great nomenclatural host, if the former names may be reckoned the *commissioned officers*.

We are tempted to give the names of *counties* properly (as we conceive) classified under this head, by way of illustration—not in *all* the States; that would consume far more time than could be spared on an occasion like the present; but in *one* State. We select Texas: in *fault-finding*, the principle is universal that the farther from home we choose examples, the safer the fault-finding can be practiced. This principle is applicable from the humblest walks of domestic life to the loftiest range of philosophical investigation. We take at random from the map of Texas the following names of counties: Jones, Taylor, Runnels, Edwards, Webb, Starr, Kerr, Gillespie, Mason, Coleman, Brown, Archer, Young, Hamilton, Burnet, Hays, Karnes, Caldwell, Williamson, Bell, McClellan, Johnson, Parker, Cooke, Ellis, Robertson, Harris, Chambers, Walker, Hardin, Anderson, Henderson, Smith, Wood, Hunt, Hopkins.

Very many of these names are identical with names of counties in our own State; in our neighbor Kentucky; and in half the other States of the Union. We complain not at the deservedness of their bestowal: doubtless in each State where the names are found, the particular Jones, and Smith, and Anderson and Walker were gentlemen of sterling merit richly deserving the compliment; but the confusion growing out of the multiplication of such names is interminable. We complain not of a want of euphony or beauty in these names; but the grandest poem, or richest oratorio that ever human genius produced would fatigue any mortal ears into a sense of monotony if constantly recited. And this is the smallest of the objections. Not as counties alone, but as towns and cross-roads, and streets and post-offices do these and similar names figure on our maps of the various States in every conceivable combination.

In whose honor were the foregoing names of counties in Texas conferred? In whose honor the similar or analogous names of other States? The few of the present generation who happen to know will soon pass away. The antiquarian of future times may discover, if idle curiosity be worth the gratifying, and if haply the original acts of the Legislature conferring them contain preambulatory mention thereof, and have escaped the “dusty death” which awaits sooner or later all such records.

In illustration of the uncertainty of the preservation of legislative intentions in the bestowal of such honors, allow the presentation of a singular instance. In whose honor was the handsome and thrifty village of *Clinton*, in Tennessee, named? That question was propounded to us recent-



ly in another State. Inasmuch as we felt all the natural pride in reference to the village connected with happy days of early life, and nativity in the neighborhood, we investigated the subject. After some effort we succeeded in finding a copy of the official pamphlet acts of the Tennessee Legislature of the year 1809, and examined the law changing the name from *Burrville* to *Clinton*. But *which* Clinton? For at that period, two gentlemen of that name held deserved eminence: *De Witt* Clinton, who had been actively engaged in the Hamilton-Burr feud in New York which led afterwards to Hamilton's death at the hands of Burr, and who had, in 1802 fought a duel with Swartwout the friend of Burr? Or *George* Clinton who succeeded Burr in the Vice Presidency of the United States in 1805? There is nothing in the preamble, or in the body of the act, to indicate; and if the precise significance of the honor is preserved in any record, or runneth "in the memory of man," it lies not within our knowledge. In 1864 there were one hundred and one localities named *Clinton* on the map of the United States. To honor whom were the other hundred so named? It would be an amusing (though excessively *idle*) curiosity, if life had no more serious duties, to investigate the subject.

In the United States are fifteen villages named *Midway*. In Georgia not only is there a village named *Midway*, situated about two miles distant from Milledgeville, but there is in another county in Georgia a post village named *Midville*. Oglethorpe University, being situated in *Midway*, a flourishing Institution, it became desirable to have a post-office established in the village. It was observed that the students of the University, during the excitements attendant on sessions of the Legislature of Georgia in Milledgeville, then the Capital, became seriously encumbered with weighty correspondences. Visits to the Milledgeville Post-Office were abnormally necessary: abnormally as regarded scientific and literary progress—normally enough in precocious political and other knowledge floating frothily on the surface of life in State and other capitals. Hence the need of the *Midway* Post-Office. But being established, distributing Post Masters and other careless officials made infinite confusion in the interchange of letters directed respectively to *Midway* and *Midville*—to say nothing of that growing out of the existence of the numerous *Midways* in adjacent States. President Talmage of Oglethorpe University, one of the ablest and best of men, represented the grievance to the General Post-Office Department, and was surprised by a change of the name of the *Midway Post-Office* to "*Tal-*

mage." But the difficulty was increased: there were *four* other places in the United States, with a similar name, Talmage—slightly different in spelling, but substantially the same; and the *village* yet being named "Midway," and so set forth on our maps, careless persons persisted in addressing letters to "Midway" as before. Letters addressed to Talmage—especially if the "Georgia" designative of the State were carelessly written, or carelessly examined by hurried officials—went often to other *Talmages*; and if addressed to *Midway*, they were sure to go astray. Wherefore—strange to say—the young gentlemen of the University, with sufficient perplexities aside from postal troubles in climbing the rugged hill of science, preferred to conduct their necessary and extensive correspondence through the *Milledgeville* Post-Office—especially during the sittings of the Legislature.

And here one great practical inconvenience of this extensive multiplication of a few favorite geographical names in the United States—this wholesale *dispersion* of them all over our national map, I might term it—may as well be alluded to. Man—the term, be it well understood, is used *generically*, comprehending *both sexes*—man in this latter half of the 19th century, is pre-eminently a letter-writing and a letter-reading creature. If the whole of Prof. Darwin's startling philosophy of the Descent of Man be true, we may expect, ere many generations elapse, to find the *advance corps* in the march of literary "national selection" stepping into the world with pens in their hands already fashioned, nibbed and inked. It is of the highest moment that the letters we write should reach their respective destinations, and likewise those written to us. Steam and electricity by hastening human intercourse immensely, has practically lengthened our lives as measured by our possibilities of achievement in the matter of both physical and intellectual results. But "*Avarus semper eget.*" The more we have, the more we want. In the particular now under special consideration, I may say the more we *imperiously need*; for the rapidities of modern action by reason of the great revolutionizing material agencies referred to, and the consequent structural organization of our daily life (so to speak) in the year 1871, actually *require* the utmost certainty and speed in our postal communications. We have not *time*, therefore, to await the arrival of a letter which shall perambulate the United States in search of the *right* "Midway," or the right Washington, Jackson, Madison—or Smithville, Jonesville, or Brownsville—until it stumbles upon the proper *species* in that *genus* of Post-Offices, or



drops defunct into the great postal Lake Asphaltites, the tideless *Dead Letter Office*.

To obviate a similar difficulty, on a larger scale, than that which led to the postal change of the Georgian Midway to "Talmage," the General Post Office Department has recently changed the name of the new Capital of West Virginia from Charleston to *Kanawha City*. The name is appropriate as being distinctive. In the boundaries of this new State are *two* places named Charleston—one, we believe spelled slightly differently from the other, but both essentially the same, and so very similar at best as to cause the Post Office Department to make the change just mentioned. But little good will come of this—indeed worse confusion probably—unless the Legislature of that new and vigorous scion of the Old Dominion likewise change the name to *Kanawha City*, for State and all other purposes. And inasmuch as *one Virginia* is enough on the map of the United States, and ought to suffice the complimentary duty to the shade of the great Virgin Queen in whose honor it was named, we venture to suggest that American geographical conveniences would be served by naming the State otherwise than *West Virginia*. *Kanawha*, the name of its chief interior River; or *Appalachia*, the generic name of the vast mountain system of which its area is a part; or *Algonquin*, the generic name of Aboriginal nationalities occupying that and other territory prior to their displacement by the white man—either would be better than the compound *West-Virginia*. And this brings us to the consideration of the remedy for this great geographical nuisance, the infinite multiplication of a few favorite names, or multitudes of indifferent names, and other cognate evils, which befog American geography to an extent never attained in any other country. The remedy proposed is the employment of distinctive and appropriate Aboriginal or other terms, in the designation of localities or districts. This should be effected in two ways: 1. The application, in the main—not exclusively—of Aboriginal terms of euphonic peculiarity to new places; and 2d. The revision of our geographical nomenclature, and substitution of distinctive Aboriginal, or other terms to places now inappropriately named.

1. There should be a distinctive and peculiar name assigned to each geographical object which needs a name. Especially is this true in reference to those places which are, or may become, Post-Offices. And it would be better for the General Post-Office Department to have ample power over the geographical nomenclature of the United

States, under the guidance of wise and careful constitutional and legal authority. That authority should not be limited to the fixation of a mere *postal* name to a locality, as in the cases mentioned of "Talmage" in Georgia and "Kanawha City," in West Virginia; but it should be ample to pass upon the name officially for all purposes; to revise, if necessary, State Legislation in the bestowal of names; to have in short, that supreme control over the geographical nomenclature of the country which should insure to us a system of uniformity in variety, of combined beauty and utility, worthy of a great people: not a separate system for each State, but one uniform system for our great national Republic. Surely the veriest stickler for "State Rights" can not find in this suggestion any attempted abrasion of aught valuable in State sovereignty. National authority, ample, and lodged in some one Department of the Government—we have suggested the Post-Office Department—would be absolutely necessary to secure the desirable elements mentioned in Geographical Nomenclature. State Legislatures, however desirous of conforming to the nomenclatural philosophy here advocated, would be liable to fall into duplicative mistakes, acting often simultaneously and at widely distant parts of our continent. Hence the need of one supreme central revisory authority.

The magnitude of our geographical nomenclature assumes gigantic proportions if we pierce with a vision of sure calculation, not of conjecture, for a few moments, that veil which an elegant modern writer has termed "a veil of mercy" because it "hides the future from our sight," and gaze as we may do, without pain, in pride at the great futurity to which our Republic is tending. In an area of nearly three millions of square miles contained in the territorial limits of the United States, we have a population, according to the census of last year of only 38,095,680 souls—about 13 to the square mile. What population is that as compared with our territorial *capacity* in this respect? Belgium supports a population of 430 inhabitants to the square mile. France, prior to the great desolating war which in the last eleven months has reduced her from a first to (at most) a second rate power of the world, and has smitten her with a frightful mortality, reckoned 182 to the square mile. Our State of Massachusetts contains according to the census of 1870, one hundred and eighty-seven inhabitants to the square mile. It may be safely estimated that the whole territory of the United States, on an average, will be supporting not many ages hence, one hun-

dred people to every square mile of territory. And as Bishop Berkeley poetically prophesied a century and a half since, the moving of "the star of empire" Westward, now in the course of rapid fulfilment, we feel that we are indulging no conjectural dream at reckoning our population in the not very distant future at 293,616,800—100 to the square mile. In a "settlement" of this immensity, and density, it is easy to perceive that a mighty host of geographical names will be required. If we proceed under the present system, the Washingtons, Jeffersons, Jacksons, Joneses, will each run up into thousands instead of hundreds, and confusion will be, indeed (to speak *Miltonically*) "worse-confounded."

To obviate the difficulty, we have but to take the hint given us by those who have handed down through successive races, and unwritten languages, the grand old mystic name *Chimborazo*, and follow that hint to its legitimate results. That philosophy of nomenclature was indeed largely followed by the earliest explorers and conquerors of territory in the New World. Not only did *Chimborazo* survive a conquest the most cruel that defaces the pages of history; but the map of Spanish America is rich in the number of euphonious Aboriginal names enstamped there indelibly. The names of Mexican States afford some fine examples—as Sonora, Cinaloa, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and others, not omitting Mexico itself.

The commendable habit of adopting Aboriginal names into our Geographical nomenclature within the boundaries of the United States has never been wholly omitted; but it has not kept pace with the real wants of our expansion as a great people. It seems to have fallen considerably into disuse in later times. In our colonial days perhaps men were less aspiring after Geographical honors than in later times they have shown themselves to be. They left more Aboriginal names to designate newly found objects.

If we turn, for example, to the map of Virginia, the oldest of the English settlements in America, we shall find a singular adoption of Aboriginal names into geographical use. We shall find a singular absence of names of the early explorers pasted with ready facility, like labels on bottles, along the borders of the newly discovered streams. Those early explorers had not learned the easy trick of geographical immortality so much practised in later times. Perhaps we may assume that they had less "*assumacy*" in them than more modern heroes: we introduce a Georgian word "*assumacy*" to our audience this evening as a worthy candidate for admittance into the columned temple of



the next edition of our great National Dictionary ; a word truly meeting a want of the age to express without circumlocution the peculiar quality most necessary to modern eminence. The word came into use in that State some twenty years since, and has been adopted in the usage of scholars and eminent public men. Smith, as we have seen, baffled the cunning of Powhatan, and founded on a secure basis "The Old Dominion," without leaving a Smithville in all the domain he had wrested from the savage. Neither did Amidas, nor Barlow, the adventurers of 1584, attempt to affix their names to a single stream of water or a strip of land which they explored, in the territory reckoned at that period as Virginia, but now a part of our own noble mother-State, North Carolina. Even Sir Walter Raleigh—the mightiest of the early Virginian explorers and adventurers, although some idle attempt was made, no where persisted in leaving on mountain peak or plain, by river, shore, or island border of his favorite element, the ocean, any one of the seven different forms in which that great name was written in his day. How well *he* could omit to climb by such steps towards earthly immortality we can judge, (and judging, *excuse* the humbler means of notoriety in later days) when we reflect on the estimate which his great life, and still greater death, has elicited from the pens of men of genius in different ages. Well has the most brilliant writer of modern times, Lord Macaulay, summed up his character in the following language: "Raleigh, the soldier, the sailor, the scholar, the poet, the historian, the philosopher; whom we picture to ourselves sometimes reviewing the Queen's guards, sometimes giving chase to a Spanish galleon, then answering the chiefs of the country party in the House of Commons, then again murmuring one of his sweet love-songs too near the ears of her Highness's maids of Honor, and soon after poring over the Talmud, or collating Polybius with Livy." Not even Raleigh, after linking his name inseparably in *History* to the shores of the New World, and introducing thence to the Old World the universal narcotic of modern days, tobacco, left his name *geographically* linked to any locality. The long after-thought of posterity has feebly done him that "honor" in the days when *honors are easy*. In West Virginia, a portion of *Fayette* county was cut off a few years since and erected into the county of *Raleigh* in honor of the great Sir Walter. Five other localities named Raleigh exist in the United States: the chief one, the beautiful Capital of our parent State, so named in 1792 in revival of the futile offer of two centuries before to found a city

of that name. The very attempt at that species of hero-worship in the days of Raleigh may well illustrate how very modern is the sort of "improvement" concerning the excess of which we have ventured to complain.

Among the early Royal Governors of Virginia, how few the names transmitted to us geographically! Neither Lord de War, nor Sir Thomas Dale, nor Sir Thomas Gates, nor George Yardley, nor Francis West, nor Sir Francis Wyatt, nor his "Excellency" (as we now style them) plain *John Potts*, left Geographical names. They could have *commanded* such honors—all but the last—had they wished; but they permitted the Chickahominy, and the Mattapony, and the Appomattox, to roll their waters to the sea with pagan names written on the maps along the shores. And we may add the same of Governors Harvey, and West, and Bennett, and Diggs and Matthews—all ante-Revolutionary Governors. And of about 650 names of "Adventurers for Virginia alphabetically set downe according to a printed Booke set out by the Treasurer and Councill in this present yeere 1620," as Captain John Smith informs us in his charming "*Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles*" not one, we believe has a "local habitation" on the map of Virginia, or ever had. Very many of them were British Knights and noblemen, filled with high personal ambition: yet they did not seek to supersede Aboriginal names of places in the New World.

Right well has noble Virginia preserved geographically the fine old Aboriginal names—especially in that which I will venture to designate as her *fluvial* nomenclature. In addition to the three examples just mentioned, we may add Potomac, Monongahela, Kanawha, Shenandoah, Rappahannock, Roanoke, Chickahominy, Pamunky, Mattapony, Piankatank, Opequan, Nottaway, Occoquan, and Chopowamsic. In later times other names came to other Virginian streams. Rivers named respectively Buffalo; Little River, with an "East Fork" and "West Fork;" Roach's River; State River, and North, and Meadow, and Cherry Tree River, and Cranberry River, and William's River, Coal River, Little Coal River, and Tug River, with tributaries designated on the map as the Dry South Fork, and the Beach Fork, and the North Fork, and the Elk-Horn Fork, all of that same Tug River! We shall add but three more: Pole River, and New River, and Cheat River. We simply submit the question to human taste which is the superior Geographical nomenclature, that of the Red man or that of the White?



We trust no one will imagine for a moment we are endeavoring to hold up Virginia—either of the Virginias, for *now* there are *two*—to ridicule. There is no especial room for ridicule in that quarter, among Tennesseans—or indeed the people of other States. Let us illustrate:

In Tennessee are the following Rivers: Reelfoot—Forked-Deer, with a North Fork, a South Fork, a Middle Fork and a *Little* Middle Fork!—Wolf, Beech, Big Sandy, with a West Sandy tributary; Duck, which one of her native poets celebrated more than a half century ago by a spirited ode commencing with the couplet,

“Down on the little river Duck,  
Where many a wagon and team has stuck”—

Red River with two “Whippoorwill” Forks, and others, flowing from Kentucky into the main stream—Stone’s River, with East and West “Forks”—and Harpeth, Elk, Collins, Buffalo, Caney Fork, Cumberland, Roaring, Obeys, Big Emory, Little Emory, New, Powell’s, Little, Pigeon, Clinch, French Broad. Many of these have numerous “Forks” which we omit. As a set off against these, we have a fewer array of fine Aboriginal names than the Virginians. Tennessee, Obion, Hatchee, Sequatchee, Hiwassee, Ocoee, Tellico, Nollichucky, and Watauga very nearly exhaust the supply.

The Georgians have done better in preserving the fine old Aboriginal names of Rivers. The map of that State displays but the following of English origin, with perhaps a few unintentional omissions: Flint; Turtle; North; Newport; South Newport; Broad; Yellow; Cumberland; Macey’s; St. Mary’s; St. Simon’s; Great Saint Illa, Little Saint Illa; and two Rivers in distant parts of the State, each named *Little River*! We have seen that Virginia and Tennessee, also, is each enriched with a Little River. We have not examined critically the maps of the numerous States and Territories; but we presume not one of them can do without one, at least—or *two*, as in the instance of Georgia.

On the other hand, Georgian fluvial nomenclature exhibits a large catalogue of euphonious, and I may add without attempting in this discourse to explore that field at length, *significant* and *appropriate* Aboriginal names. The following are examples: Chattooga—Tallulah—Tugaloo—Chattahoochee—Conasauga—Oostenaula—Chicamauga—Thronateeska, which is the beautiful Aboriginal name for the stream in Georgia in later times characterized by the highly original and distinctive name of *Flint* River (a name which designates only *eleven* other streams in the United

States)—Ocopilco—Allapahaw—Ogeechee—Oconee—Ocmulgee—and Altamaha.

We may remark that rivers and mountains seem to have preserved more frequently their Aboriginal names than other geographical objects. The latter—as the civil boundaries of newly settled districts—were for the most part, artificial, and the *creations* (in one sense) of the white man. No corresponding name to represent the precise object existed in the Aboriginal languages; or if it did, the pioneer was not learned enough in the red man's tongue to use it; or, if he were, possibly he did not admire, or love him sufficiently to fancy its adoption. There were often tomahawking and scalping scores to settle between them, and a general feeling of "unpleasantness." The white man was relatively to the savage in the wrong focal distance of sound to blend the discords of the red man's language into harmony. We can well comprehend this. The most natural spirit in the world, and illustrative of what we are considering, is observable in the quaint old title page of 1716, as follows: "The entertaining History of King Philip's War which began in the month of June, 1675, as also of Expeditions more lately made against the *Common Enemy* and *Indian Rebels* in the Eastern parts of New England: With some account of the Divine Providence towards Col. Benjamin Church: By Thomas Church, Esq., his son." Whilst, therefore, most naturally, and indeed often from necessity, adopting his own geographical names (and of course *English* names) for *definite boundaries of territory*, it is no less surprising than gratifying that these honest old Indian haters should have adopted so many Aboriginal geographical names of mountains and streams as they did. Wherever they did otherwise, however, their tampering hands touched but to damage.

The map of the State of South Carolina may afford a good illustration of what has been said in the foregoing paragraph. Of her 29 Civil Divisions, and the 29 cities and towns where the courts for these divisions are respectively held, not one is of Aboriginal origin. Of her thirteen principal Rivers, ten bear Aboriginal names, and most of them very euphonious. Three, only, bear names of English origin. Of these, *two* in widely distant parts of the State bear the name of "Broad." One of these South Carolina *Broad* Rivers (there are more of the same name in other States) stretches its beautiful waters through the very region once occupied by the romance-famed Yamacsee Indians. The pen of a distinguished *litterateur* of South Carolina has preserved the romance of the history of the

**Yamassees.** A small paragraph in history of colonial days, and a scanty corner in old colonial maps; these remain. The beautiful river of the tribe is now *Broad River*, No. 2, South Carolina. Why not Yamassée?

A glance at the map of New England will show a commendable preservation of Aboriginal geographical names: not so euphonious, usually, as those of more Southern climes, but distinctive and far preferable to any of those great crops of nomenclatural tares which threaten all the harvest of variety the geography of a grand country and a vast people ought to possess. We shall find that the heroic Pilgrim Fathers had other duties to perform than those of affixing, or causing to be affixed, to towns and villages, counties or territories, their own immortal names. Plymouth was named in commemoration and gratitude of the sympathy and hospitality of Plymouth in Old England, the point from which the Mayflower took her departure from the Old World. Of the fourteen counties of Massachusetts, we find but one of Aboriginal derivation; but we find the name of the State itself, and those of the Rivers Connecticut, Chicopee, Housatonic, Quinnebaug, and Merrimac; and of the Hoosac, Wachusett and Taconic Mountains; and Narragansett Bay; still redolent of memories of the good Massasoit. But of the names of the good Samoset who exclaimed "*Welcome Englishmen!*" and of the noble old Chieftain Massasoit; and Squanto, and Hobomac his braves—the four who first "interviewed" (to use a fashionable modernism) the travel-worn pilgrims from a distant shore, not one lives in Geography. Almost has the ungrateful old colonial geography treated with equal neglect the Pilgrims themselves. John Carver, Governor of the Colony, who received Massasoit, *perhaps* has one such memorial in Massachusetts. Bradford, his successor in the Executive, is barely remembered: so with Brewster. And Robinson, Cushman, Winslow, Standish, and a host of others, live alone in that "vangracy" which Captain John Smith saith "wandereth without any certaine habitation," to-wit: *History*; but they do not so much as touch the soles of their feet to the firm land of geography.

In other New England States, and indeed in the other old States of ante-Revolutionary origin, it is perhaps needless to institute research. What has been said already of the geographical nomenclature of some of them, will doubtless, with little modification apply, in its general principles, to all.

The newer States springing into existence at the close of the Revolutionary struggle, or soon afterward, excluded



in great measure Aboriginal names. The pioneers were too patriotic to omit all possible honors to the heroes in the Senate and in the field during the great struggle; and the Red man's conduct during that bitter and protracted War had not been of the character to create any fresh fund of love for him. An Aboriginal name of the utmost euphony—made up of flowing liquids, and vowels in sweet profusion—would have been less attractive to his patriotic judgment than the harshest combination of consonants of which any name of a great Revolutionary leader was composed. It is almost to be wondered at that our forefathers selected the name "Tennessee" when they obtained admittance as a State into the Union: that "Frankland," or "Franklin"—or as Lippincott erroneously has it in his great "Gazetteer of the World," *Franklinia*, should not have been preferred.

In selecting names for *States* and *Territories*, however, in post-Revolutionary times, a commendable good taste has usually prevailed. Euphonious and appropriate names are, in general, the result. Our patriotism must forbid complaint at the selection of the name of *Washington*, the 254th geographical time, to designate a territory lying on the Pacific. But one of its capes on the Pacific Ocean is named *Flattery*. Just compliments, too often repeated, degenerate into *flattery*; and in the most beautiful elegy in any language, our English poet remarks on the futility of flattery "to soothe the dull cold ear of death." By multiplying that great name geographically we but flatter ourselves that we do not degenerate from his grand example of probity and patriotism: Human vanity often essays to reap where it affects to sow. The fame of Washington towers sublimely above all geographical names. It needs them not. We but stultify ourselves by overdoing such honors. Standing beside the tomb on Mt. Vernon, as we did a few months since, and in the apartment where his eyes closed forever on earth, we *felt* with FULL force for the first time, his immeasurable exaltation in *true* glory above every other hero of ancient or modern times.

In selecting a distinctive name for each geographical object, we do not advocate the exclusive resort to Aboriginal sources. Without doubt that is the great fountain whence the desired uniformity of dissimilarity must be supplied. But peculiar circumstances may occasionally suggest an appropriate word as the name of a geographical object, and in adopting it, we may run but a small risk of repetition elsewhere. The example of our East Tennessean and beautiful river Clinch is at hand. The story is well

known—how the name originated in a circumstance attendant on its earliest exploration. An Irishman of the party who was ignorant of the art of swimming, fell from the rude raft into the water, and so energetically exclaimed “*Clinch me boys!*” as to undergo much raillery after rescue, and the stream acquired from the circumstance the appellation which has displaced the euphonious and more appropriate one of Aboriginal origin—*Pelissippi*. The latter has been fortunately preserved to our day in an old map accompanying Adair’s quaint old book, “*History of the American Indians*,” published almost a century ago in London. The name no where appears in the text of the book. We have felt more anxious for the restoration of the beautiful appellation *Pelissippi*, since the name in Georgia is often supposed to commemorate a very distinguished citizen and soldier of that State, Gen. Duncan L. Clinch, in whose honor a county in Georgia is named. Our River Clinch had received its name long before General Clinch as the intrepid drummer-boy at Lundy’s Lane won his spurs of knighthood, or had been born.

Notwithstanding the unfortunate result of the nomenclatural effort to commemorate with certain and indisputable distinctness the Irishman’s exclamation by the name of Clinch River, we need not be wholly discouraged in reference to English names. Those of *persons* of eminent services, and not too general distinction, and of names not too common or widely dispersed, may well be adopted. Even in that case, however, the name should possess certain elements of dignity, euphony and uniqueness. Colquitt county in Georgia and Sevier county in this State, may serve as happy examples. Maynardsville—if the “ville,” (so very unnecessary) were but Legislatively elided, is distinctive and appropriate. If the distinguished gentleman who bears it, and for whom the village was named, will refrain from that excess of distinction which will plant a hundred *Maynardsvilles* in the United States, we know of no handsomer name—associated as it is with many of the noblest aspirations of some of us at this University in the “long ago” when that gentleman so ably filled the chair of mathematics here.

To merit *geographical* honors, according to our own philosophy, our great men must be compelled to win them in *moderation* only. Our humorous poet, Oliver Wendell Holmes, tells of some funny verses he wrote once in “*wondrous merry mood*,” which his footman read as he carried them to the printer, so greatly exciting the mirth of the



footman that a dangerous "fit" was the result ; wherefore, the poet concludes—

Since then, I never dare to write  
As funny as I can."

We warn all candidates for *geographical* distinction that they must not be as *distinguished as they can*. If their names come to be-dot our maps until they become nuisances, no matter how euphonious, or how immortal in history, we favor *expunging resolutions* in the domain of Geography.

2. Yes: Expunging Resolutions. We sorely need a national revision of our already existing Geographical Nomenclature. Not only should national authority be exerted, as already suggested, to prevent evils in the future ; but those in the past should be corrected. One vast and harmonious and beautiful system, characteristically American, free from duplication and confusion, should be provided for the tens of millions of people of our day, and the hundreds of millions of future ages. National and individual good taste, and convenience, will be thereby immensely subserved. We say this with full knowledge, and approval in general, of the wise caution of Lord Bacon in his essay on "Innovations" in States, where he remarks "It is good not to try experiments except the necessity be urgent, or the utility evident ; and well to beware that it be the reformation that draweth on the change, and not the desire of change that pretendeth the reformation." Surely in this case the "reformation"—the sore need of it—*demands* the change.

The late Mr. Schoolcraft, the eminent American Archæologist, suggests an unfailing fountain from which an abundant supply of distinctive geographical names can be drawn. His two valuable papers entitled respectively 1. "Plan of a System of Geographical Names for the United States, founded on the Aboriginal Languages ;" and 2. "A description of the Aboriginal American Nomenclature ;" present a complete plan for that purpose. Long catalogues of Aboriginal words in several of their languages, appear in the volumes of Mr. Schoolcraft. Without going into particulars, we may simply say that an ample magazine of materials is there stored for the formation of an almost illimitable supply of distinctive, euphonious, and appropriately significant names. The two papers referred to appear in the Third Volume of Mr. Schoolcraft's great work, which was published in 1853. Already a glance at the maps of some of the newly-risen States of the West will show that the hint of Mr. Schoolcraft has been put into practical operation.

Mr. Schoolcraft's philosophy, however, is only present and prospective in its proposed beneficence. Ours is retro-active, also. We would undo what has been illy done in the past, and subject the maps of even our oldest States to that process whose term has grown familiar to American ears—*Reconstruction*. Power for that purpose should be lodged in some of the Briareus-like arms of the National Government. The Post-Office Department would perhaps be most suitable. Since *Conventions* are the ready American expedients for manufacturing or directing public opinion, we suggest a Great National Geographical Reform Convention to meet in Washington City on the assembling of Congress next December, to devise proper measures for the needed reform.

Our poverty-stricken Geographical nomenclature has two Carolinas: cannot one be styled *Catawba*, from one of her Rivers? Or the other *Pamlico* from one of her border seas?—thus avoiding the threadbare prefixes of "North" and "South." Could not *York State*, and *Hampshire State* cast off their old garments of "*New*," at the least? And if that would too greatly *Anglicise* them, could not *Monadnock*, or *Merrimac* suffice for the latter, and *Niagara* or *Ontario* for the former? So with the two Virginias. Or *better*—peculiar and distinctive Aboriginal names can easily be exhumed from the early history of these several States where they have slept for ages without any geographical application. But the naming of States is mainly a matter of taste. There is a needful reform which we may almost characterize as one of necessity: that of striking from our national Geography all precise repetitions of names. Possibly we could endure *two* of each of the *favorites*: but they should have a certain relation to each other: one should *contain* the other, as the county, a city; or the State a county, or a River.

And while the car of Geographical Reform is in progress, we should not fail to carry back to the Old World, and drop them there, our very many absurd importations of names of towns and cities from that quarter. Our 28 American *Romes*—an average of one in each State, and one Territory—we should write their names on bits of paper like the good Buddhist Sandara of whom Father Huc tells in his Thibetan travels, and waft them across the seas on the passing gales to the "Eternal city" of Romulus whence they sprung; and we should affix to each locality thus denuded a name indigenous to the soil, characteristic euphonious, appropriate, and beyond all, *American*. No servile imitation of the Old World should find a point, or

a line, or a fragment of the alphabet on all our great National Map. Even our own proud Memphis, grandly seated on the shores of the Mississippi River, we would divest of her Egyptian name, dropping it on the border of the Nile at the foot of the colossal statue of Sesostris where amid ruins it belongs; and we should affix to her *Chisca* the grandest of the names of the Princes who there held his royal Court and admitted De Soto to an audience at the foot of his throne in the year 1541; and all the air over mid ocean should be darkened with the hosts of other names servilely and most inappropriately borrowed from the East, as they should wing their flight in flocks like wild pigeons across the great deep. A mere glance at the map of the State of New York reveals *Troy, Utica, Syracuse, Ithaca, Venice, Genoa, Lisbon, Canton, Madrid, Pharsalia, Salem, Stockholm, Potsdam, Carmel, Waterloo, and Greece*. How many thousands of these and others of analagous kinship exist on our National Map, in New York and the other 46 States and Territories, no man knoweth. Take *one* of these names as an example: there are 52 *Troys* in the United States: an amount of Troy-weight oppressive and scarcely endurable. To these places, each and every one, however thrifty in goods and merchandize, in money and trade, in bank and railway stock, in morals, in all other sorts of greatness, yet absolutely starving with a frightful nomenclatural famine, the salutary specific of a peculiar distinctive American name is needed for perfect geographical normalcy. We commend to them the study of Mr. Schoolcraft's volume already alluded to where they will find suggested, but never yet (so far as we know of) applied, such names as *Adosia*, meaning in *Algonquin*, the original language of the locality of Troy New York, "Fair deer land"—*Agosia*, *fair shores*—*Minoma*, good Water—*Moriana*, Good Spirits. From the Iroquois, the other great language of New York State, *Onatta*, Hills of the Valley—*Tiaroga*, place of water and rocks—*Ontio*, beautiful hills—*Conataro*, tree at a gorge—and many others—with a supply of radical words in various languages providing for their indefinite multiplication by the simplest laws of permutation.

Our beloved mountain land, in the midst of which we are assembled this evening, is rich in the nomenclatural euphony her geography borrowed from the beautiful language of our predecessors—the Men of Divine Fire, as the laborious old author Adair translates the word *Cherokces*. To the South of us stretch the lofty and picturesque summits of the *Unaka*, or as the oldest authorities better had the orthography, *Unicoy*, Mountains—a name signifying



*snowy*, or *white*, from the early sheen of snows upon their summits in autumn, and their late lingering there in the season of spring. With how many of the holiest and noblest aspirations of our earlier years, when we pursued our studies in the honored precincts of our beloved Alma Mater, is that distant and misty mountain chain associated! Thanks to the accomplished East Tennessean artist, Mr. F. J. Fisher, for transferring to canvass so many of its worthiest scenes.

We may mention further among the geographical names of this region, borrowed from our Aboriginal predecessors, *Tuckaleechee*, signifying *about to catch on fire*, doubtless from some incident, now lost, in the early Cherokee occupancy of that region—*Tellico*, signifying *between the mountains*—*Watauga*, intensively “Thank you”—*Pelissippi*, a name descended from former races (as *Chimborazo*) to later tribes in possession of the territory, and adopted by them without retaining the signification—*Wariota*, the handsome Aboriginal name for Cumberland River whose signification is likewise lost, but which should be geographically restored to the beautiful stream now bestrid by an inappropriate name borrowed from England, and which ought to be paid back—*Ayquosti*, the beautiful name for our East-Tennessee *Little River* (there are only 21 “Little” Rivers in the U. S.) handsomely signifying *like a river*—i. e. not quite a river, and yet large enough to be *like* one—*Chilhowee*, signifying *wound around*, or *spiral*. And the following names should be restored: to Lookout-Mountain—there being at least three other localities in the U. S. designed as “Lookout”—*Tantacana*, signifying *looking at each other*: *Tacunuwalli*, or *Weenastuna* (the latter signifying *endless*) in lieu of the borrowed plumage under which the beautiful *Cumberland Mountain* chain has been compelled to disport himself in these latter days. And others: but this discourse approaches its allowable limit, and we forbear. We had intended to offer some remarks in comparison of such a great system of Geographical Nomenclature as we advocate, with those prevailing in other great nationalities of the globe; and also some reflections on the incidental influence of Geographical names on national character itself. But we forbear, with these remarks, intended to incite others to think and to reason out the principles in their own way rather than to adopt ours. If we have suggested aught valuable, either in avoidance of future evils, or the reformation of old ones, we shall flatter ourselves that we have done the State some service. “General observations” (says Locke) drawn from particulars, are the jewels of

knowledge." And that we should seek a thorough, not a partial reform, touching the past as well as the future, we may consider the pithy saying of wise Sir Richard Baker, in his fine old "Chronicle of the Kings of England" that "*Policy looks to the middle—Wisdom to the end.*"

The intense industry of modern research is exploring every field of inquiry; and with new aids borrowed continually from nature, human reason penetrates more and more profoundly into the mysteries of the universe. In astronomy, especially, the progress of present knowledge is marvelous. In various other branches of physical science, it is scarcely less so. In all the arts of Peace—and alas, in those of War, also—man's inventiveness and energy presses forward with unceasing and accelerated force. Even in morals let us continually pray that we may be making progress. In the vast field we might have essayed to be a more ambitious reaper; but we have been content with an humbler task, and now we lay the little sheaf down before you. In the language of a great poet's apostrophe to Time:

"Among the mightier offerings, here are mine!"









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